

**Remarks of Eric Schwerin, Member
U.S. Commission for the Preservation of
America's Heritage Abroad
At the Official Event on the Day of Commemoration of Victims of
Genocide against the Jews in Latvia
July 4, 2016**

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Ambassador, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honor to be here in Riga for this ceremony, particularly on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the horrible events that took place here and on a day the United States, a nation of immigrants from around the world, celebrates the independence of our nation.

I had the privilege to be in Europe at another important time in Europe's history. Twenty-five years ago I moved to Prague to teach English to Czech students of all ages. The Berlin Wall had just fallen and there was optimism about Europe's future—a belief that Europe would once again be united. I spent a lot of that year traveling the continent myself; visiting the cities my ancestors emigrated from and the sites of past atrocities. It gave me an appreciation of the importance of preserving these sites so future generations can learn that the Jews were once and continue to be an integral part of communities across Europe.

Now, returning to the region today the preservation of sites like this one continues to be important, perhaps even more so. I hope by remembering the atrocities that happened on this spot 75 years ago and spots like this throughout Latvia and Europe we can make sure people do not suffer because of ethnic and religious hatred. Europe must be fully committed to tolerance and acceptance of peoples of different faiths.

I am proud that President Obama appointed me to be a member of the U.S. Commission on the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad at the recommendation of Vice President Biden.

The Commission was established to address the concern that the physical remnants of Jewish heritage in Central and Eastern Europe, largely depopulated of Jews by the Holocaust and Communist repression, was being lost due to destruction or neglect. The Commission's mandate includes obtaining agreements from governments in the region that cultural properties, including places of worship, historic sites, cemeteries, and

memorials, will be protected and preserved. The Commission is pleased to provide funding for this memorial.

Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel, who passed away just a couple of days ago once said “*To forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.*”

This work, and others like it across Latvia, exemplifies what Elie Wiesel meant and what the Commission was founded to do – to preserve, restore, protect and memorialize the cultural history of Europe associated with America, and in the case of this site here today, a place associated with the heritage of both Americans and Latvians.

I want to thank the local community for the work they do here to preserve this heritage and I want to thank you for inviting me to attend this important event.